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"Till He Come"

1 Corinthians 11:26

Consideration of Some Aspects of the Lord's Supper

Larry Steers

The word "ordinances" (1 Corinthians 11:2) is "paradosis". This word is translated "traditions" twelve times and "ordinance" once in the New Testament. Here the word draws our attention to an essential, and very important gathering of a New Testament assembly each Lord's Day. This gathering has the highest authority since it was introduced by the Lord in the upper room. At the conclusion of the Passover, the Lord placed bread and a cup before the disciples. The bread and the cup were totally distinct from the Passover. At that moment, as the disciples looked at the bread and the cup, they had little comprehension of what was before them. In our thoughts, we move forward from that upper room to a scene after the Lord suffered on the cross, arose from the garden sepulcher, and was received up in glory. An unrecorded scene, perhaps in the same upper room, with those disciples and likely others should cause us to weep with them. They must have been moved to tears as they looked at the bread and the cup with understanding.

In the upper room, the Lord was physically present. They watched Him, they listened to Him giving thanks for the bread and the cup. He is also present today, for He said, "there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). The expression, "the Lord's supper", emphasizes His presence at His supper while "the breaking of bread" emphasizes the presence of believers who break bread.

It is likely that most believers reading these words embrace with deep conviction the precious truths relating to the Lord's Supper. Entering the hall, occupying a seat, and fastening the eyes on a table freshly spread represent

the most important hour of every week. However, the words of Peter rise in thought before us. "Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth" (2 Peter 1:12). The soul of the believer has often been stirred when truths that they believe are presented again in freshness and power.

Hence, the purpose and exercise here is not to speak about the body of our Lord as seen in the bread or His precious blood shed as indicated by the cup. However, now since over two thousand years have passed into eternity since the Lord's supper was introduced in the presence of the disciples by the Lord, it remains unchanged, the same bread and cup. How beautiful it is that devout saints gather to remember Him, but it is only "till He come" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

1 Corinthians 11 could be divided into three sections based upon the reports which had reached the Apostle Paul. He therefore reminds the Corinthians:

1. Deportment of Brethren and Sisters when the Assembly Meets (v. 2 to 16). In this section of chapter 11 we are reminded of the vital, precious truth of headship so beautifully and meaningfully illustrated by the covered head of the sister and the uncovered head of the brother. While the head covering is being declared by some as not essential, let it be stated clearly that no truth in the scriptures is optional.

2. Division in the Corinthian Assembly (v. 17 to 22). Any division will bear heavily on the collective company's appreciation of the person of Christ at the Lord's Supper. Therefore, the Apostle Paul solemnly charges the Corinthians, "when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you: and I partly believe it" (1 Corinthians 11:18). When Paul says "I partly believe it", it may be equivalent to saying "I would that it were not true". He further emphatically writes "When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20). Evidently some brought food (v. 21) and placed it upon the table with the emblems. They failed to discern the emblems purposed for the Lord's supper and the food they had provided. Some ate and others went hungry. Paul's corrective ministry was very pointed when he wrote, "have ye not houses to eat and to drink in" (v. 22).

Today it seems to have become customary to have a time of fellowship following the Breaking of Bread, but great care should be taken that this should not become more important the Lord's supper.

3. Discretion at the Supper (23 to 34). Paul was

at Corinth for a long time. In Acts 18:11 we read, “he continued there a year and six months, teaching the Word of God among them”. No assembly had a greater privilege than Corinth. It staggers our thoughts that the apostle was at the Lord’s Supper at Corinth for 78 weeks. Had they heeded his ministry the problems here and throughout this epistle may never had occurred.

Here, meditate on some aspects of the Lord’s Supper which may be easily overlooked. Every believer in Assembly fellowship rejoices to read of and to be reminded of the upper room and the institution of the supper by our Lord when brethren lead the gathered company in worship. Yet, the writer of 1 Corinthians chapters ten and eleven who tells us most about the supper was not present at its institution. Nor did he consult with those who were present on that occasion. He is very definite and declares “I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you that the Lord

Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread” (1 Corinthians 11:23). How very precious even today to respond to our Lord’s command quoted by Paul “this do in remembrance of me” (I Corinthians 11:25).

Paul and his traveling companions arrived at Troas. It would seem that the party planned to be at Troas “when the disciples came together to break bread” (Acts 20:7). While Paul ministered the word on that occasion, the Lord’s Supper was far more important than listening to any man.

It should again be noted that the Breaking of Bread beyond its institution is referred to only three times in scripture. At Jerusalem, “they continued steadfastly ... in the breaking of bread” (Acts 2:42). The apostle enlarges on the Lord’s Supper in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11. There is the reference to Troas above. While we know precious details about the planting of assemblies in Jerusalem and Corinth and less about Troas, the supper is associated with an assembly.

Reception is to the fellowship of an assembly. Most will realize that the definite article is before each of the truths found in Acts 2:42, therefore the subject is “the fellowship”. One of the priceless privileges of this fellowship is to gather with like-minded believers and to remember the Lord at His supper.

There is an interesting truth spoken by the Lord in John 3, often read publicly but seldom ministered on. Note “the wind bloweth where it listeth” (John 3:8). While the new birth is the subject of the passage the “wind” as a type of the Holy Spirit causes us to consider his mighty movements.

Apply the wind as a type of the Holy Spirit to the Lord’s Supper. Concerning the “wind” our Lord said “canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth” (John 3:8). As the wind is unpredictable in its movements, so is the Holy Spirit. Brethren, if we can predict the pattern that the Breaking of Bread will follow in prayers and hymns week after week, are we really being led by the Holy Spirit? Do we give out our favorite hymns? Or, do hymns flow with what we have been reminded of in the audible worship of various brethren? Or do we follow the pattern of a hymn and a prayer?

Note an interesting detail given in Leviticus 2:1. The subject is the meat offering, or better expressed as “the meal offering” which is composed of fine flour. We read “when any will offer a meat (meal) offering” (Leviticus 2:1). The offerer is referred to as his and he in verse 1 and as “he, and “his” in verse 2. A man in Israel had a burden to offer a meal offering to his God. Alone, in his tent he began to prepare his offering. There is much about his offering he did not know but his burden was to present this little offering to his God. He kneaded the flour, poured oil upon it along with frankincense, and brought it to Aaron who burned “the memorial of it upon

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the altar to be an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord". (Leviticus 2:3).

Permit me to make an application of this touching moment as an example. A brother in the assembly spends time alone with the Lord in the quietness of his room. He is touched, overwhelmed by his meditation on the person and work of his Lord. Would we be critical of this brother if he arrives at the Lord's Supper with a pressing burden of love, appreciation and devotion to Christ and then he rises and overflows in expressing his worship before a hymn is sung? Or are we content to follow the pattern of a hymn and a prayer?

Years ago a reporter in a certain city made it his practice to visit a church service on the Lord's Day and write a report for the Monday morning paper. One Lord's Day he visited a Gospel Hall. He wrote "they have two books, a little book and a big book - they claim the big book is most important but use the little book the most." We love our beloved hymns but how important it is for every brother to simply express his own worship as we remember our Lord Jesus Christ.

"People cannot thrive on the spiritual power of their parents; each generation must personally experience the reality of God."
Wolf

Hold Fast (anon).

Beloved, we would just say a word as to holding fast what we have got. If the Lord has mercifully delivered us from man's traditions, let us see that we are not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. In these days there is departure from the simplicity that is in Christ. But this need not stumble us, as Scripture plainly forewarns that this will happen. We may be delivered from going back to Egypt and yet we may have Egypt in our hearts. We may not go back to the world's system of religion and yet the world's system of religion may find its way in among ourselves. Many who once began, in the guilelessness of early love, by giving the Lord Jesus the place in the midst, are now content that some other one should have that place. Not only is there departure from the truth but "My people love to have it so." This is caused by love growing cold and the heart getting away from God. When Moses went up to the mount to meet God, Israel could not endure the his absence. To wait until Moses would come down was more than an impatient, murmuring people was equal to. And hence we find, as soon as Moses was out of

sight, that they must have someone, or rather something to look at. The flesh cannot wait on God. It takes some little measure of faith to endure as seeing Him who is invisible. Hence the golden calf. Now, beloved, our Moses is away on the mount with God. Our Lord Jesus is within the veil and we are waiting for Him. Let us wait in patience. He is both Lord and Christ. Let us give Him His true place and we shall have no lack. By His Spirit He is here to guide us and lead us into all truth—o satisfy our soul in thought and keep us alive in famine. Let us honor Him and abide in His ways. We may appear weak and helpless but we need not care if the Holy One is great in the midst. If others depart from the path of faith and simplicity, that is no reason why we should do so. On the other hand, in the midst of flickering light and wavering testimony, is there not all the more urgent need that we should hold fast the things that God has taught us?

(WIS Sept 1939)

Bright Lights in Dark Places, pt. 2

Joel Portman

Bright lights are those believers who develop and maintain a positive testimony for God despite the dark conditions in which they must live. They do not succumb to the deadening influence of those around who have no desires to please the Lord. Their light is not dimmed because others are not shining for God. NO, they go on in faithfulness, with consistency of life and testimony As a result, they are marked in the pages of God's Word as those who honored Him. Because of this, God honors them (1 Samuel 2:30).

Enoch, who we considered last month, was a bright light for God in the days before the flood. But there were other dark days in the experiences of God's people, such as those days when Israel was in Egypt. The Word of God records a period of severe darkness during which some shone brightly for God.

Darkness of Egyptian Experiences

In Egypt there was severe opposition to God's people from one who occupied the highest position in the land. Pharaoh determined to destroy the people, the progeny for God and continuation of God's testimony, the line through which the Messiah would come, and to ruin their families as a result.

The decree went out that every man child was to be thrown into the river while every girl child would be saved alive. What a disaster for families! What discouragement for anyone in that day as they thought of the future of the nation! Behind this opposition, we can

discern the working of the evil one, the devil, to destroy all that is of God.

Surely there were overwhelming obstacles to prevent anyone from going on for God in such a day! What could they do? Where would they turn? The godly Israelite turned to the Lord and cried to Him (Exodus 2:23-25) and God heard.

It was a day in which the burdens of slavery were added to the dilemma of death. They were forced to toil under extreme severity to build cities for Pharaoh. What future would these conditions hold for them? There was no time for anything for God, no opportunities to serve Him, nor any leisure to contemplate and meditate on their God. The pressures of their lives and circumstances became a slavery and bondage that would stamp out any consideration of spiritual things in the normal way. In such a time, we can see that severe discouragement would result, and they would lose sight of the greatness of God and His sufficiency to meet their needs.

It was also a day when the majority of the people had turned to idolatry, at least in some measure. They never seemed to lose sight of God completely but the language of Scripture seems to indicate they had adopted the pagan practices of Egypt by this time. The effects of the Egyptian culture and society had caused them to adopt Moloch and Remphan (Chiun) (Amos 5:25-26, Acts 7:42), idols which they carried with them into the wilderness even as they professed allegiance to Jehovah. They reverted to the worship of the bull Apis at the foot of Mt. Sinai (Exodus 32:1-4), an idol they had seen and possibly worshiped in Egypt. With such conditions, how could anyone let their light shine so that they could be a positive testimony for God? Surely with Pharaoh's edict ruining their will to live, bondage robbing them of strength to labor and Egyptian idolatry sapping their spiritual power, there was not much to encourage them to go on! Yet we thank God there were those who rose above the distressingly dark circumstances of their day to live for God and go on for Him.

Does not Egypt suggest conditions many of God's people face today? Is there an effort to ruin families and hinder perpetuation of God's testimony? Isn't there an aspect of spiritual powers seeking to enslave God's people in the business world, in the commercial and social world as well as in the leisure world of this day? Cannot we see the tendency toward forms of idolatry as material things become substitutes for the place God is to have. Are there those who will rise above these conditions and shine for God? Yes, there are those who will do so in our day just as they did in the past.

Exercise of the Godly Couple

In those circumstances, we find a couple who rose above the restrictions and binding conditions of their lives. In Exodus 2, we find a couple named Amram and Jochabed (Exodus 6:17-26, Numbers 26:58-60, 1 Chronicles 6:1-3) who displayed godly exercise despite the darkness.

Note that Jochebed was born after her father Levi came into Egypt (Numbers 26:59). Thus she was one who personally only knew Egyptian conditions, yet those conditions didn't rob her of spiritual exercise for God. Her name means "Jehovah is glory or honor," indicating that her parents had hearts centered on God and His glory even in such a land. Amram married within the tribe of Levi, desiring a wife with similar convictions to his own, a vital factor in determining the future of the married life. He actually married his aunt, permissible in those days. His name means "exalted people," showing the faith of his parents that God would deliver Israel from bondage. Parents can give guidance and help to determine the future potential of their children as they anticipate their part in fulfilling God's work in their day.

When their son, Moses, was born, they saw him as a child with potential for God. This shows an exercise to have children that could be raised for God and His use. "Stephen states that Moses was fair to God, beautiful in God's sight (Acts 7:20). This gives the key to their faith. They were not merely delighted at the natural beauty of their child, their faith enabled them to realize that God had purposes in view for him, and enabled them to defy the power of the world and the decree of its king" (W. E. Vine). "If it is the nature of faith to bring the future into the present, then it must be believed that these parents saw beyond the physical, and recognized a moral worth in their child, and indeed a prophetic destiny, and they were determined to save him from death in the river." J. M. Flanigan, "What the Bible Teaches").

Such faith shines brightly when the darkness is most intense around it, and in this way Amram and Jochebed were a positive testimony. Their determination resulted in efforts to save Moses's life. First, hidden in the home at great hazard, then in the ark on the banks of the river. They had to trust God to enable them to hide him in their house, but in a greater way they trusted God to protect him in the very river that was Egypt's instrument of death. The reality of their faith was displayed and proven as God upheld them and preserved the child. In our day, how good it is when parents see potential for God in their children and seek to preserve them in the home environment, and when they must leave, in faith commit them to God for His preserving care.

God honored their exercise, and the results are well known. What a difference from what might have been if they had despaired and not determined to display their confidence in God and His purposes for their chil-

dren. We often think of Moses, but Amram and Jochebed's three children went on to be used of God to lead His people. This seems to be at least partly the result of their parents' purpose to honor the Lord and trust Him in the darkness of their day

May God help believing parents today, in a world that wants to take your children and rob God of them! May you too have the faith of an Amram and a Jochebed to preserve, protect, and hedge in your children by the Word of God and prayer! Then may you be given faith to trust God to bless in their salvation and preservation for Him! Honor God in this way, and we are sure God will honor you.

"We must realize two things about this kind of complacency. The first is something Erich Fromm once pointed out when he said, 'Hate is not the opposite of love. Apathy is.' To be complacent in the face of Calvary is the greatest possible rejection of God. The second is that complacency grows like a cancer. ...Maybe part of the problem lay with the first [Joshua's] generation. Interestingly, however, the book of Judges puts none of the blame there. The second generation was held responsible for their failure, and God would not allow them to shift the blame."
Inrig

Distinctive Ministry

anon

When God would speak solemn words concerning the judgments to fall upon a wayward and rebellious people, was it not the Divine Wisdom that chose a Jeremiah to speak to the people? The message did not come from a hard, unfeeling heart. The name he has been given—"the weeping prophet"—aptly describes a characteristic of this faithful servant who could say, "Oh, that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jeremiah 9. 1). Well would it be for all who bear messages of this sort to do so with chastened spirits, with tears, even in secret, and with true sincerity. How often a message of "judgment" has been followed by a spirit of "lightness" which is not consistent! How can any who bear such a message be unfeeling, or let the burden lie lightly upon the heart?

Instances of this might be multiplied, but the above will suffice to illustrate that we fail to do so. Instead, some well-worn sermon is passed on again and again,

while the people of God, especially young of the flock, are wearied and have their souls starved. It is one of the things "hard to understand" how some who "minister" in this public way have so little fresh and God-given ministry to pass on. Surely there must be a lack of definite study—a slothfulness and lack of application. At times the writer hears at conferences the same messages repeated over and over again with months and years intervening. Some may say—"Well, they are new to some," but to one who realizes responsibility as a "faithful and wise servant" to give food to the household in due season, this line of things surely bespeaks low spiritual development. If unable to give something definite and fresh from the Lord (even "things old" can have a spiritual freshness and unction about them), why not have grace to "sit still"? Sad to say, those who have least to give are often most forward! Especially at certain seasons, when His people are gathered together to wait on the Lord to hear His voice in the ministry of the Word—special meetings, or conferences, or the like—it is very important that the message, if it is to be of real and lasting value, must come after the manner mentioned above—distinctively from God. To use the time merely to give a word (which might be perfectly scriptural) with no particular bearing on the character of the gathering, is a great mistake, and to give a message which has not cost real and deep exercise of soul is a greater mistake. There has been an abuse of the seeming freedom to minister at such meetings that has caused grief of heart to many of the Lord's people, and even caused such conferences to cease for the lack of definite messages from the Lord—short and concise. It is an evidently shows a lack of ordinary Christian courtesy, as well as an absence of spiritual discernment, for brethren to monopolize precious moments with ministry which is a constant repetition. It is sad to think that men who should be able to bring forth "fresh" or "timely" messages for God's people today often fail to do so.

It is beautiful to notice in the Epistles how each one bears a special message, whether to the "churches" or to individuals. Surely the pattern of the Holy Spirit is that which we should follow to lead on, help and encourage the hearts of His people in these difficult days of testing. These are days when many are being discouraged and are turning aside, when the truths which have been such a blessing to many of His own and to the whole Church are little valued by many who once professed to love them and to have gotten them from God. When we come together around Himself on Lord's Day morning, how the Word which brings us to the Cross to behold our blessed Lord brings a response from the hearts of His own! In the prayer meeting, in the Bible reading—truly a short message which bears upon the nature of the gathering is a help. God can use any vessel that is cleansed and fit for His use if willing to be used, to

speaking the Word from Himself, and when it so comes it will be readily acknowledged to be "timely" and "suitable" by all who can discern His leading. We would doubtless all agree that ministry is God's way to reach the hearts and consciences of His people. It has always been His way to speak to His own so as to bring before them His mind and will, to correct and to guide, to humble and cheer. However, in reading the Word, we cannot but be struck by the fact that at different stages in the history of His people there are those whom the Lord God raised up as messengers and gave them their messages. He did it in olden days by vision and revelation, through the Spirit; He does it to-day only through His Word, and in conjunction with it, in the power of the same Spirit. The Spirit came upon them, shall we say, spasmodically, but now He constantly indwells and, if ungrieved, He constantly instructs. Different conditions exist among the people of God that call forth messages from God that vary in their character but all unmistakably bear the stamp of His authority. One of the pressing needs among the people of God today is one of authoritative messages from the Lord that meet the present need, that savor the Spirit's unction. In Hebrews 3:5 we read of Moses' faithfulness as a servant in God's house and who can read the words of this messenger of the Lord without being conscious that we all listen to one who received his messages from the Lord, who spoke to the hearts and consciences of the people of God. Who can listen to the burning words of Isaiah and his denunciation of the people's sin without endorsing the words of the Spirit again in Romans 10:20: "Isaiah is very bold"? Yet this same messenger, when God gave to him the message in connection with the restoration of the people as in Isaiah 39:40, could speak comfortably to the heart. His ministry was distinctive.

Let us seek to emulate the pattern of those who spoke in the past as "oracles of God" (1 Peter 4:11).

The Little Maid

John Riddle, Cheshunt, England

Notice the background: Naaman had been used by God to give deliverance to Syria, and that evidently included success against Israel. God controls the affairs of nations, and takes account of character. Naaman was not only "a great man with his master", he was also "honourable". Acts 10:34-35 states, "Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is

accepted with him". It is a sad reflection on Israel, that the Syrians were able to bring back captives from their raids. The overall lesson of the passage lies in the significant words:

"A mighty man . . . a little maid"

The 'little maid' from Israel might seem very insignificant when compared with mighty Naaman, but she played a vital role in his life, and through this, in the life of Syria! She is a wonderful example of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29, "For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: but God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: that no flesh should glory in his presence".

Let us consider firstly her captivity

"And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid; and she waited on Naaman's wife". So we are made aware that:

i) Her early life had been shattered by tragedy. She had been uprooted from home and family, and carried off to a strange land. Humanly speaking, it was all without rhyme or reason.

ii) There is no hint of resentment against God. Her words, "'would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!" strongly suggest that she did not blame God for her circumstances.

iii) God was in complete control of the situation. He was going to use her in a very wonderful way. Paul would similarly maintain in Philippians 1:12, "But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel". Paul was in prison! In an epistle written about the same time, he calls himself "the prisoner of Jesus Christ" and "the prisoner of the Lord", Ephesians 3:1; 4:1. God had pronounced judgment against the throne of Israel in 1 Kings 19, but one of Ahab's sons was still king, and it is a child that suffers. It all looks so terribly unfair. But as we shall see, this poor child was, notwithstanding, in the right place, at the right time, with the right objective, and in the right spirit to do the right thing. All the happy results that followed turned upon her words so fitly spoken, "Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy".

iv) The little maid was evidently highly regarded. "She waited on Naaman's wife", and when she said "Would God my lord (i.e., Naaman), were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his

leprosy”, people took notice. If she had been an unreliable, ne'er-do-well, it is extremely unlikely that her mistress would have bothered to think any more about it! As it was, Naaman went to the king of Syria about it! This is the sense of verses 4-5, where J. N. Darby renders it in his translation, “And he went and told his lord saying ‘Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel. And the king of Syria said, Well! go, and I will send a letter to the king of Israel!’”.

Her commendable life, even as a slave, gave value to her testimony. How much does our conduct commend our testimony? See Colossians 3:2-25, and Titus 2:9-10.

Now consider her concern

She displayed no vindictiveness. She could have rejoiced in Naaman’s misfortune. After all, it was his army that had carried her away from home and family. But she was obviously deeply concerned about his welfare. Listen to her again. “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy”. She seeks nothing for herself. Her master, with all he possesses, is more wretched than she, and her heart yearns over him for blessing. She knows the character of the plague that is destroying him, and that none but God can heal it. He is an idolater and lost and she longs that he should be with Elisha. Her philanthropy is of a high and far-reaching order. She says not, “Would God my lord were relieved of his misery”, but that he “were with the prophet”. That is the first thing with her; the bodily healing would follow.

What an example for us! Here is a slave, in the spirit of grace, desiring the blessing of her master. She is a daughter of Israel. He is an enemy of her nation. The Lord Jesus taught, “Love your enemies; bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye might be the children of your Father which is in heaven for he maketh his sun, (so the sun belongs to Him), to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust”, Matthew 5:44-45. He was, of course, the perfect example of His own ministry, see Luke 23:34.

The analogy between leprosy and sin is well established, and we are immediately confronted with the question of our concern for people stricken by sin. Do we really care that most of those we daily come in contact with are perishing?

Now view her courtesy

“Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!” She refers to Naaman in the most courteous terms. Titus 2 again demands of us that servants “be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; not answering again”, v. 9.

Notice she is not without her convictions

Her words, “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy”, speak volumes. As we shall see, she spoke with great confidence, but that confidence was based on convictions formed from her earliest years. Although in a foreign land, she had not forgotten early teaching. Her faith, tested by captivity, proved very real. Her early convictions helped and sustained her in captivity and bondservice. This should encourage us in several ways:

i) It shows the value of teaching the word of God to young people. Witness Paul to Timothy, “But continue thou in the things that thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them; and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus”, 2 Timothy 3:14-15.

ii) It shows the value of receiving the word of God while young. The ‘little maid’ not only remembered what she had been taught, but she displayed her conviction that God could heal Naaman. Are we really people with convictions like that? Or do we just pay lip service to what we hear and read? There was nothing cosmetic about her faith!

We marvel at her confidence

It was her deep conviction that enabled her to speak with such confidence. “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy”. The ‘little maid’ had no doubt about it, “he would recover him of his leprosy!” She had an intelligent faith. She knew that it was by the prophet alone that her master could be blessed, and that if he were with Elisha, he would be blessed. Paul exhibited a similar confidence, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God unto salvation, to everyone that believeth”, Romans 1:15.

Notice

i) She was a first-class ambassador. After all, an ambassador is away from home in a foreign land, and represents his (or her) home sovereign. The ‘little maid’ did this exactly. She spoke eloquently about the blessings and excellence of her homeland! She could almost sing: I am a stranger here, within a foreign land, My home is far away upon a golden strand. Ambassador to be of realms beyond the sea, I’m here on business for my King.

ii) She had confidence in God. “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria!” The words, ‘would God’, are a short wish or prayer.

iii) She recognized the ability of the servant of God. “Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy”. She was referring, of course, to Elisha. She acknowledged

that he was a man of God, v. 8, who had the word and power of God. Perhaps she felt like the 'great woman' of Shunem who said to her husband, "I perceive that this is an holy man of God, which passeth by us continually", 2 Kings 4:8-9.

iv) She was far greater in spiritual intelligence than both Naaman and the king of Syria. The 'little maid' made it quite clear that her master could only be blessed through, 'the prophet that is in Samaria'. But Naaman was sent to the king of Israel armed with a letter from the king of Syria. It was addressed only to him and not to the prophet, "Now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have therewith sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy"! No wonder the king of Israel panicked! The 'little maid' had 'an unction (anointing) from the Holy One', and knew 'all things', 1 John 2:20. Compare 1 Corinthians 2:6, "Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect: yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought".

Now be thrilled with her compensation

i) God was honored by her faith. We often forget that faith is always honoring to God.

ii) She initiated a series of events that led to Naaman's cleansing. She was not involved in his actual cleansing. She did not play anything like the part played by Elisha, but it all started with her! Following her testimony, "one (i.e., Naaman), went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel." She pointed out the right place to go, and the right person to see. She could not heal Naaman herself, but she knew who could! What is more, she didn't keep it to herself. So it is with us as we read 2 Corinthians 4. 5, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus sake".

We have the answer to the most serious human problem of all, but are we pointing people to Christ who can meet every need? The 'little maid' could rejoice that her seemingly little role brought such a marvelous result! She first linked Naaman with the living God whom Elisha served.

The lesson for us is clear. The Lord Jesus taught that, "he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal: that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together. And herein is that saying true, One soweth, and another reapeth", John 4:36-37. We might feel very small and insignificant, like 'the little maid', but faithful witness for Christ will bear fruit beyond our wildest imagination!

We should not be surprised at her concealment

The Scriptures say nothing more about her, not here, or anywhere else. She has played the part given her by

God, and now disappears. We do not even know her name! But although we do not know what ultimately happened to her, (did Naaman send her back home out of gratitude?), she will never be forgotten. God has made sure of that! Her record is 'on high' Job 16:19, as well as in 2 Kings 5.

Hers was a hidden ministry. Not public like Daniel and his three friends, who were also captives in a foreign country. After all, Daniel, "continued even unto the first year of king Cyrus", Daniel 1:21. Some servants of God have a quiet and hidden ministry, others are constantly before the public eye. But both are vital. The work of sisters could be likened to the former, and the work of some brothers to the latter. But both are alike precious to God. Both are invaluable and essential. Both are mutually complementary.

The 'little maid' beautifully illustrates the exhortation in Ephesians 4:6, "See then that ye walk circumspectly (carefully), not as fools, but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil". J. N. Darby points out that the expression 'redeeming the time' means 'seizing every good and favorable opportunity'. She is an example to us all in doing just this.

The Power of God

Thomas D.W. Muir

God must reveal Himself, His greatness, grace, and glory, or with all our fancied knowledge we must remain in ignorance of Him. How varied are the opinions of men as to His character. One man speaks of Him as though He were a cruel tyrant, more than willing to crush the creatures of His hand. Like the "hard and austere man," who "gathered where he had not sown" (Matthew 25:24), they think of Him as exacting from other men what they cannot give.

Another speaks of God as though He were such as themselves, who would wink at sin. And even though He had threatened judgment on account of it, He would fail in the execution. In other words, they think of God as a weakling, unable, and perhaps unwilling, to deal with the rebellion of His creatures.

But those who are the children of God know Him as He is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ. "The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him" (John 1:18). They know His matchless love, His boundless grace, His inflexible righteousness, the exceeding greatness of His power, and rejoice in them all.

Regarding this latter attribute of His character, His power, Scripture is blessedly clear. Shall we note a few of its manifestations?

1. His Power to Judge: "Fear not them which kill the body, but [have not power] to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matthew 10:28). Man can put an end to this life, but God can not only kill the body, but cause both body and soul to miserably perish in hell! This judgment all have deserved, and from it none can deliver himself, or redeem his brother. Neither can any future obedience cause the old debt to be canceled, so that, humanly speaking, our case is hopeless. And--solemn thought for the Christ-rejecter--the One who is ordained to be the Judge is the same One who was despised, rejected, and crucified. To Him the Father has given "authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man" (John 5:26-27). But, blessed be God, He is now exercising His power to show grace.

2. His Power to Save: "The Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins" (Matthew 9:6). He still has "power," and the "earth" is still the scene of His gracious activities. The gospel of Christ is still "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth" (Romans 1:16). For, while the "preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness," to those who are saved it is the "power of God."

What a mighty change is involved in such an act! Once lost, now found. Once treading the ways of sin and death, now brought to God. Once exposed to wrath, now rejoicing in His great salvation. As the Son of man, He is appointed to be the Judge, but it was the Son of man who came to "seek and save" the lost.

3. His Power to Make Alive: "Dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1) is man's natural condition. What could be more terrible? Not dying, merely, but dead. Medical aid may reach a dying man, but the physician stands impotent in the presence of death. Nevertheless, the proverb is true that "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," for those who were once dead in sins are quickened by God's power and now have life in Christ.

Thus the apostle prays that the Ephesian saints might know "what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead" (Ephesians 1:19-20).

In other words, the same almighty power that brought again our Lord from among the dead has now quickened us in Him. "God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us...hath quickened us together with Christ" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

4. His Power to Keep: "I give unto them eternal life, and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand. My Father, who gave them Me, is greater than all; and none is able to pluck them out of My Father's hand. I and My Father are One" (John 10:28-30). What a place of absolute security!

He has "begotten us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Peter 1:3-5). The inheritance is being kept for us, and we for the inheritance.

Paradoxical though it may seem, we who are assured of salvation now are being saved, and still hope to be saved. Saved from the penalty of our sins by His atoning death, we are being saved from the enslaving power of sin by His priestly intercession. And we hope to be saved from the very presence of sin in all its humiliating and defiling character at His coming again. Then will our salvation be complete, and we shall enter into our eternal inheritance (see Ephesians 5:25-27).

Jude addresses the saints as "them that are called, beloved in God the Father, and kept for Jesus Christ" (Jude 1, RV). He closes by saying, "Now unto Him that is able to keep you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and power, before all time, and now and for evermore. Amen" (Jude 24-25, RV).

5. His Power to Serve: "Let My people go," said the Lord to Pharaoh, "that they may serve Me" (Exodus 8:1). That is God's order still: liberty first, then service. And surely God well deserves our best service! But how humbling it is to learn that we have no power to serve Him, except as it is given. "Without Me ye can do nothing," said the Lord. As it is His power that saves and keeps, so it enables us to serve.

Before His ascension, the Lord Jesus told His disciples to wait until they were "endued with power from on high." This power they received on Pentecost when they were filled with the Spirit. Later, when Peter and John were surrounded by a curious multitude who had heard of the cure of the lame man at the Beautiful Gate, Peter protested: "Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man walk?" The power of the risen Christ had enabled them to speak strength into his helpless body.

None were in their labors more abundant, or in blessing to souls more fruitful, than Paul. He makes known the secret of the power he had for his service: "I can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13). Again he says, "When I am weak then am I strong." God's grace was sufficient for him, and His strength was made perfect in His servant's weakness. The enemy was puzzled at the power of God's witnesses, but when they, by threats, sought to stop them, they merely drove them to God for fresh grace and more power, which He gave them (see Acts 4:21-33).

6. His Power to Subdue: Sin has created widespread rebellion against God, as well as ruin in God's fair creation. While the Lord Jesus was on earth He went about as a man among men. A mighty Man, a wonderful Man, a gracious Man, a powerful Man He was--His enemies themselves being judges. He went about "doing good, and healing all those who were oppressed of the devil, for God was with Him," but after all, it was but a slight amelioration of the outward condition in which the world then was. The rebellion was in the heart of man, and that remained.

It is true there were a few who, seeing deeper than the surface, believed on Him, but the mass neither knew Him, nor would they receive Him. A Roman gibbet was their answer to the grace of God in sending His Son. The power of sin and Satan seemed to prevail, but the triumph was only temporary. God has Him at His right hand till His enemies become His footstool. And this result will be brought about not by the civilizing effects of the gospel, as some would tell us, but by the exhibition of His mighty power to "subdue all things unto Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

The world doesn't know this, but His people do, and are looking for the time of His manifested glory, when He will change their bodies to be like the body of His glory. But that power which He will use in them, He will also later use in the suppression of all evil "till He has put all His enemies beneath His feet." To Him shall every knee bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God (Philippians 2:10-11).

Well might we echo then that heavenly song, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb forever" (Revelation 5:13).

Truth has been out of fashion since man changed his robe of fadeless light for a garment of faded leaves.

Grace and Gift

The words "grace" and "gift," in the New Testament sometimes are very similar as to their meaning. But the word grace appears to be a wider and richer expression giving more glory to "the God of all grace." It is possible to have considerable "gift" and very little "grace."

The apostle Paul in speaking of his ministry very frequently refers to it, not as his gift, but as the grace of God bestowed upon him. In many respects he is a pattern man; and surely in this respect in lowliness of mind concerning his ability he is an example of what all ought to be who seek to serve the Lord. In referring to his

labors, he says "yet not I but the grace of God which was with me." 1 Corinthians 15: 10. It is the same grace that saved us to begin with that is required to enable us to serve God acceptably. We are just as unable to serve without grace as to be saved without it. If we keep this in mind it will help to keep us from being puffed up. How frequently the consciousness of this would drive us to the throne of grace?

The apostle in writing of the trust that was committed to him says, "If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward," Ephesians 3:2, "whereof I was made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God," (3:7): "unto me who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given," (3:8). What a mercy it would be if all who take the place of being the Lord's servants were characterized by the same humility, and consciousness that all that they have has come to them as grace.

In the second epistle of Corinthians the word grace is used a number of times, not in connection with preaching, but of giving, (see chapters 8, and 9). He speaks of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia: of how, in their deep poverty they were willing beyond their power. He desired Titus to finish in them at Corinth the same gift of grace also. As an incentive to this he reminds them of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, "that though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich," 2 Corinthians 8:9.

Then again, the brother whose praise was in the Gospel was chosen by the churches to travel with the apostle when taking this grace, or gift, up to Jerusalem. Nor were the churches the poorer for their giving for God giveth more grace, so to the cheerful givers God was able to make all grace abound toward them, so that they might abound to every good work, (9;7-8). Their giving is called "service," "ministration," "distribution," yet it was "the exceeding grace of God in them," when traced back to its source, causing him to exclaim out of a full heart, "Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift," 2 Corinthians 9:14-15.

If this "grace" were but entered into more fully, how it would add to the joy of giving to the work of the Lord; and to humility of mind in those who preach the Gospel! David said "of thine own have we given thee." Those who now give with little exercise of heart would be made to rejoice, and abound in this grace. Doubtless many Christians and assemblies are lacking in this grace, and so the work of the Lord is at a standstill in their midst. It is sometimes said that the assembly prayer meeting indicates the spiritual condition of the believers. The assembly offerings do the same. "God loveth a cheerful giver."

H. F.